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PUPIL PARTICIPATION IN ADMINISTERING THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

LAURA M. JOHNSTON
State Normal School, Oshkosh, Wisconsin

One of the fundamental ideals of a junior high school is the recognition of maturing social and intellectual capacities and interests on the part of the student body. In providing an opportunity for greater self-direction along these lines it is a decided advantage to have the pupils in the junior high school participate in the administering of a wide range of problems relating to (1) pupil conduct and (2) the general educational interests of the school.

The growth of pupil initiative, co-operation, and responsibility in solving problems of school conduct has great possibilities through the organization of the school city. Schools, varying widely as to type, have already taken advantage of this particular form of school activity as a means of increasing self-government and developing a growing conception of the privileges of citizenship. With these aims in mind, there are certain advantages in having this organization based on the form of government of the city in which the children live.

The experiment here described¹ is the outgrowth of definite problems of ordinary school life, some of which are traceable to certain physical conditions of the school plant, others to the general plan of organization of the school or to the administrative policy.

The junior high school occupies the third floor of the building. A large central room serves as a study and general assembly room as well as a home room for Grades VII A, VIII B, VIII A, IX B, and IX A. Overcrowded conditions have made it necessary to provide a special home room for the VII B section.

¹ This experiment is being conducted, under the direction of Miss Jennie Marvin, in the Junior High School of the Training Department, State Normal School, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

The pupils are obliged to share a large number of rooms equipped for and used by groups of much older students. This necessitates both groups of students using the same corridors at the same time. It also involves transfer of classes to all parts of the main building and to other buildings at varying distances on the campus. Five minutes is allowed for passing between classes.

These conditions gave rise to a score of problems relating to the conduct of the junior high school pupils. The most perplexing were (1) much tardiness in passing from one class to another; (2) taking advantage of long distances by excessive visiting, playing, etc.; (3) gathering in groups at transfer periods, thereby creating serious traffic problems in overcongested quarters; (4) abusing the freedom of normal actions and becoming *unduly* noisy at dismissal periods; (5) neglecting study assignments; (6) individual irresponsibility retarding class progress; and (7) increasing disintegration seriously affecting morale and school spirit.

The usual procedure for adjusting such conditions did not seem practicable; the problems were therefore placed before the pupils, and they were invited to participate in their solution. The most effective results were obtained through two types of conferences: (1) an assembly gathering of the entire department at which time general plans were developed under the leadership of the faculty and (2) grade meetings for the purpose of working out details for the next general assembly. Each grade elected a faculty adviser who encouraged and guided them in the various plans suggested. After several conferences the pupils proposed organizing the entire department as a school city.

The school city, composed of six wards (each grade section from VII B to IX A, inclusive, representing a ward), elects a mayor, two commissioners, city treasurer, city clerk, police board, chief of police, policemen, municipal judge, and clerk of the court. The members of the faculty are delegated to act as a supreme court of advice. The mayor is the executive, and the mayor and the city commissioners carry on the legislative work. The municipal judge convenes the court whenever occasion requires. The school city elects its officers by balloting, following as nearly as possible the regulation city election.

A program of city government was adopted. Special committees were appointed to supervise (1) traffic regulations in and about the building; (2) promptness in class transfer; (3) library privileges; (4) development of resources in each ward in terms of individual pupil and class attainment; (5) promotion of student social functions with regular patronesses; (6) pupil and faculty co-operation regarding delinquencies; (7) requirements to be imposed in cases requiring corrective suggestions; (8) regular meetings of city officers, courts, general town meetings, or ward conferences for the purpose of adjustments, corrections, and improvements. The pupils met their responsibility either independently or through advice of the faculty.

Under the operation of the foregoing program the school city has made constructive progress along the following lines: (1) the pupils have a wholesome, vigorous interest in the successful progress of a wide variety of school activities; (2) there is marked improvement in self-control and in the exercise of good judgment; (3) the scholarship of the entire department is of a much higher standard; (4) the social and business activities of the school are a source of pleasure and pride to faculty and students; (5) the faculty and pupils have a greater appreciation of each other's help and guidance; (6) the pupils have become an active and valuable factor in solving the problems they were formerly creating; and (7) the school city, through a variety of activities, has replaced all formal instruction in civics.

Establishing a school city which is to function along the lines indicated requires considerable tact and unfailing interest on the part of the faculty. The first definite experiment, started over two years ago, was successful for a short time only; it was followed by a period of almost complete disintegration, which in turn was succeeded by a new and vastly stronger organization.

The success of the present organization is due largely to a careful survey of the first attempt. The results of the study were discussed by pupils and faculty; various phases of weakness which caused the major difficulties were invariably traced to three main sources: (1) insufficient faculty guidance due to a lack of appreciating the vastness of the experiment; (2) lack of good judgment on

the part of the pupils in selecting students for responsible positions; and (3) too extensive a program for the first attempt.

The success of the school city, as now organized, in dealing with innumerable problems related to pupil conduct has been sufficiently satisfactory to suggest that the pupils be allowed to participate in a program for enlarging the educational opportunities of the school.

The school city provides an opportunity for a much larger scope of pupil initiative along all lines of educational progress. It makes possible the organization of a number of committees whose function shall be the promotion of a wide range of interests and activities which may become part of a definite school program.

It is believed that the work of the school city will in no way detract from the already established plan of supplementary work of individual class projects, but will become a source of inspiration and will stimulate a wider range of educational activities.

The experiment this year is based upon the foregoing conclusions and involves a definite program to be carried out through the co-operation of the school city. The following program sets forth the scope of educational activities to be used in the experiment.

The Museum Enrichment Committee.—The functions of this committee shall be to assist in gathering attractive material to be used by the entire school. This material may be classified under a variety of subjects or lines of special interest. Materials to be gathered are (1) books; (2) magazines; (3) newspaper clippings; (4) letters; (5) diaries; (6) pictures; (7) popular folders such as railroad guides, hotel circulars, industrial pamphlets, descriptive material relating to civic attractions, parks, etc.; (8) displays of goods such as the sets given by the International Harvester Company and other industrial concerns; (9) collections of soils, leaves, insects, etc.; (10) collections of bits of material which may be used in experiments in science. From time to time the committee will add other items which the interests of the school may suggest.

The Central Exchange Commission.—This body establishes a department for (1) listing the subjects being studied by various groups; (2) calling for specific suggestions as to sources of interesting or unique information bearing upon the problems listed; (3)

posting new items covering excellent work being done in special fields or subjects, giving name of class, subject, room number, and instructor in charge; (4) compiling a directory of travel experiences, listing the names of pupils, faculty, and citizens, giving a brief statement covering routes and places visited; for example, Harold Bickel—eastern trip—visited Chicago, New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington—Great Lakes trip; excellent information on historic places of interest.

The Committee on Classroom Service.—This group aids in suggesting definite material to be used (1) in developing an interest on the part of non-appreciative pupils; e.g., a group of ten boys co-operated with the writer in compiling a list of poems which would “appeal” to boys who hated poetry; the experiment was highly successful in creating a desire for poetry on the part of the “haters”; (2) in securing data as to the type of material which different pupils or groups find most helpful in fixing fundamental processes in the easiest way and the shortest time; (3) in obtaining a census of pupil reading, required and volitional, at home, in the library, and in school.

The Statistical Department.—The work of this section is to (1) secure records of pupil improvement; (2) post lists showing gains made by individual pupils and by classes (individual pupil names not given); (3) arrange for display of measuring scales and practice tests and explanations as to how pupils may use them; (4) collect and classify simple standard test material and explain purposes; (5) compile lists of simple directions as to how pupils may improve their work in the light of average findings related to tests; and (6) suggest additions or changes in the form of report card being used to cover new lines of activities which may develop from time to time.

The Efficiency Department.—The functions of this department are to (1) study ways and means of reducing waste in the use of all general supplies such as paper, pencils, chalk, etc.; (2) develop propaganda which will increase pupils' efforts to preserve books, maps, etc.; (3) consider methods of improving traffic regulations; (4) promote safety in fire drills; (5) aid in distribution of wraps; (6) initiate safety-first devices for the playground; and (7) suggest

devices for conservation in connection with forms of waste not itemized.

The Building Improvement Committee.—To this group are intrusted such problems as (1) making the grounds more attractive; (2) adding interior improvements, pictures, curtains, etc., and changing arrangements of furniture; (3) co-operating with the Industrial Arts Department in supplying articles which may be made there on excess time, such as window boxes, book cases, standards, racks for magazines, etc.

The Field Information Committee.—This committee establishes contacts with schools all over the country. It obtains definite information as to (1) special projects in all subjects or central projects involving the co-operation of all departments: (*a*) type of construction work and (*b*) type of supplementary academic material found most effective; (2) lists of books which boys and girls find attractive as informational material; (3) attractive social events, stunts, and parties, including descriptions as to how they are conducted; (4) popular games and how they are played; (5) auditorium programs of special note; (6) speakers and artists in neighboring cities who might be secured for feature programs; (7) data covering all types of school organizations such as debating clubs, glee clubs, dramatic clubs, and athletic organizations.

Too frequently the type of project work common in our schools is centered in a special subject which reaches out to find some means to stimulate the interest of the class. Of course, this is wholly desirable and to be commended, if a series of central projects does not exist.

The activities suggested in the foregoing program afford rich opportunities for vitalizing much of the work of the school along project lines. The various committees may call upon the entire faculty and all of the subjects in the curriculum to contribute to the carrying out of their programs of achievement.

By giving the pupils an opportunity to share in the constructive development of the educational progress of the school we shall permit them to come into their own. The schools, which are supposed to exist for them, will at last be theirs.